

ARTICLE APPEARED  
ON PAGE A-4

NEW YORK TIMES  
8 July 1985

# The Rebels Give Show In Salvador

By JAMES LeMOYNE  
Special to The New York Times

PERQUIN, El Salvador, July 5 — Peasants carried signs condemning aerial bombing, a revolutionary priest spoke of "the oppressed" and guerrillas dressed as clowns pranced through political skits before a crowd of young children.

The setting was this small, often-fought-over village, which is the center of leftist rebel operations in northeastern El Salvador. A delegation of Americans arrived here Thursday at the invitation of the rebel high command to meet both guerrilla leaders and the local population.

The unusual encounter offered an insight into the complexity and bitterness of a civil war that defies the simple black and white descriptions so often given by Government and rebel officials.

## 'Something Really Happy'

In the center of the town square a rebel clown clapped and chortled that he wanted to hear a "happy song, something really happy." Another clown quickly agreed and broke into a ditty about the four senior army officers killed when rebels in the area blew up their helicopter last year.

The next verse began, "Hey Ronald Reagan, the guerrillas downed a little plane the other day, and in it were three agents of the C.I.A., ha ha ha ha ha ha."

"Now that really is happy," the first clown said, telling the children to sing along.

As soon as the American visitors rolled into town, 126 miles northeast of San Salvador, the capital, more than 300 peasants walked around a corner chanting slogans broadcast by two men with microphones reading from a script: "Bombs no, medicine yes, bombs no, schools yes."

## War's End Is Their Hope

The peasants followed along, but one group got mixed up and began chanting, "Bombs no, medicine no, schools no," until corrected by a leader.

Asked why they had walked in from all over the northern part of the department of Morazan, several peasants said they had been told by the rebels to demonstrate for the visitors. But they also fervently expressed a hope that the war would soon.

The rebel Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front has made aerial bombardment by the Salvadoran Air Force

a centerpiece of its propaganda against the Government of President José Napoleón Duarte. The Salvadoran Air Force has bombed towns and killed civilians several times in the past, but the Government has asserted that new rules of engagement have sharply reduced civilian casualties.

## No Recent Casualties

The peasants in this region, which suffered heavy and indiscriminate bombardment in 1983, seemed to back up the Government's contention. Villagers from Meanguera, San Fernando, Perquin and Sabanetas all said that while the air force had bombed in the area, they knew of no civilian casualties from air attack in the last year.

But two peasants said that in the village of Volcancillo two months ago a strafing run had narrowly missed members of a peasant family hiding in their home. Other stories of near-misses indicated that bombing near civilian areas still goes on frequently enough to badly scare villagers.

But peasants did not criticize only the Government. They spoke instead of a war they cannot escape that leaves them caught between two armed forces, each of which claims to be fighting for them.

"We want to be independent, not with one side or the other," said Alcides Sorto, 33 years old, from Sabanetas. His wish was not granted this month.

According to Mr. Sorto and three other villagers from Sabanetas, 18 miles north of Perquin, the army forced them to leave their homes three weeks ago because they were near a guerrilla camp. But when they tried to take away their possessions, the villagers said, the guerrillas kept them from doing so, saying they had to return to Sabanetas. The guerrillas also required the male villagers to work on roads and raise crops for the rebels one day a week, they said.

The delegation of Americans came from southern California, representing private groups concerned about the war in El Salvador. The opportunity to judge what was happening in El Salvador proved not to be so simple on a one-day visit to a rebel-held town with rebel guides.

A guerrilla supporter took the delegates on a tour of houses reportedly destroyed by the air force. There was no shortage of examples. A number of buildings in Perquin appeared to have been bombed by the Government over a year ago in attacks that drove out the civilian population and did nothing to endear the army to the villagers.

## Rebel Film Team on Hand

But the first building the rebel guide showed the visitors was the mayor's office, a perforated heap of rubble. Bombs had destroyed the office, the guide said. He made no mention of the current rebel campaign to burn mayors' offices around the country in

which over 30 buildings have been destroyed, the last one two days ago.

When a rebel soldier standing guard nearby was asked about the "bombed" mayor's office in Perquin, he told reporters that in fact the guerrillas had blown the building to pieces in 1982 in an attack on the army unit stationed there. The American delegation checked the rebel's account and found it to be true.

A rebel camera team filmed the peasants' demonstration and the arrival of the American visitors, which one rebel with a loudspeaker called "a great gain" for the guerrillas.

## Rebel Chief Gives Interview

Joaquín Villalobos, the senior military commander of the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front, referred to the Government's "extermination" of rebel supporters in the capital in 1980 and 1981 as a justification for the war he is generally credited with planning and helping sustain.

It was the first interview Mr. Villalobos had granted American reporters and one of the few he has ever given.

Time, he said, was on the side of the rebels and there was nothing the Reagan Administration could do about that.

"What does the Administration plan to do when it is just a year before its term is up and El Salvador is not settled?" he asked. "What plan will they propose? Send troops?"